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ABSTRACT

The intent of this document is to provide a frame of reference to help a person in any organization assess where the organization is; what might be happening next to the organization; and in what ways he/she can influence the organization in an effective, useful, timely, and functional manner. The structure of most organizations is the result of a decision by somebody at a given point in time which arranges people, roles, responsibilities, and resources in a certain way to get some things done. The stages of organizational growth are: (1) formal/informal, (2) demonstration/developmental, (3) installation/maintenance, and (4) personnel/program. The evaluation of where the organization perceives itself to be and in which direction the organization will move forms the basis for judging which appropriate action will influence the actual activity of the organization about its mission, its style, and its social usefulness. (Graphs are included which depict the various organizational stages.) (RC)

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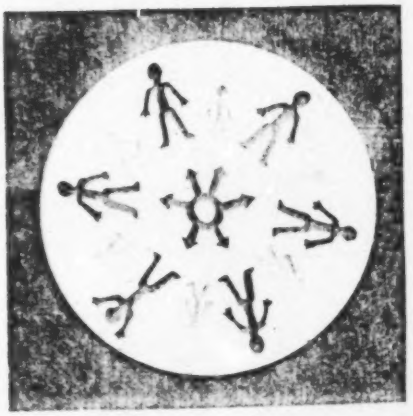

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTFUL ACTION IN ORGANIZATIONS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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Framework for Analysis and Insightful Action in Organizations
by Roland Goddu

The purpose of this memorandum is to explore some of the key characteristics of organizations which once examined could provide a framework for action. The intent of the document is to provide a frame of reference which could help a person in any organization assess where the organization is, what might be happening next to the organization and in what ways they can influence the organization in an effective, useful, timely and functional manner.

The structure of most organizations is the result of a decision by somebody at a given point in time which arranges people, roles, responsibilities, and resources in a certain way to get some things done. Very few people have the opportunity to design an organization from scratch. Most of us inherit an organization, a pattern, or at least some law which sets up the organization. While it is interesting and exciting to trace an organization back to its source, one can have more influence on the way an organization acts today and tomorrow by taking a snapshot of where the organization is and what dimensions can be influenced to increase efficiency and productivity.

Most snapshots people take determine an organization chart which answers the question who reports to and works with whom. These are valid snapshots. Argyris and Schon[1] argue for a different approach. They propose a snapshot which distinguishes expoused theory from theory in use and distinguishes the idea people would like to have of the organization from the actual patterns.

Theory in use describes the actual activities in the real world, determines the actual value which results of the actions, and indicates the standards which would test the model the organization hopes to become. This Theory of Action approach makes visible those dimensions of organizations which have the most direct effect on practice by individuals, groups and organizations in general. Some of the dimensions usually described are:

(dimension)		(stages)
1. activity pattern	:	formal --- informal
2. organization status	:	demonstration --- developmental
3. program purpose	:	installation --- maintenance
4. management focus	:	Personnel --- Program

A person in an organization, and particularly a manager, tends to evaluate what stages the organization is going through on each dimension. The evaluation of where the organization perceives itself to be and in which direction the organization will move forms the basis for judging which appropriate action will influence the actual activity of the organization independently of the rhetoric of the organization about its mission, its style, and its social usefulness.

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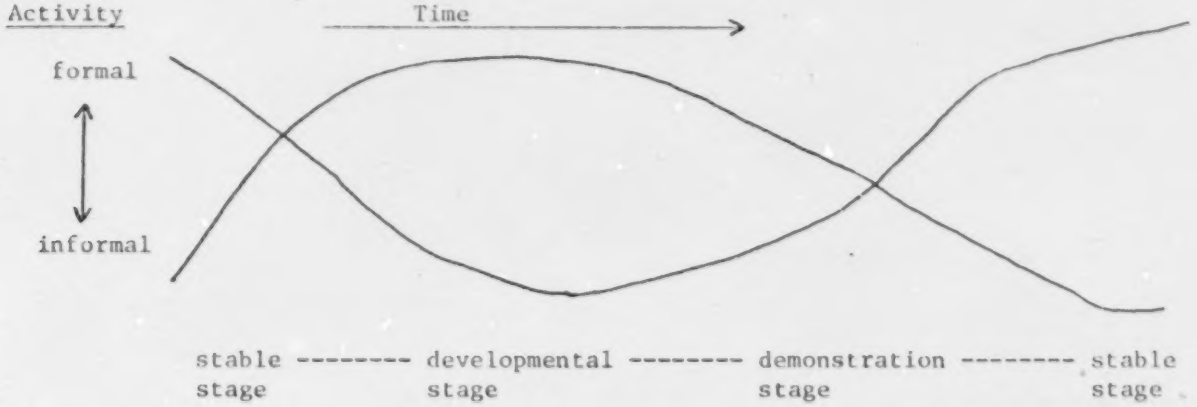
[1]Chris Argyris and Donald Schon, Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness, Jossey-Boss, (San Francisco, 1974).

If one determines that organization is FORMAL, DEMONSTRATION ORIENTED, AND PERSONNEL FOCUSED, one would expect it to value a personal verbal report by an employer of what is being done to solve a problem. Since in reality each dimension tends to be implemented at a different level and the verbal descriptions tend to pull the organization in conflicting directions, an organization evaluation is a valid snapshot only if it allows for rapid re-adjustment. A manager cannot act from the posture that the organization is constantly one thing or tending constantly in one direction on any dimension. The theory in use analysis provides a best immediate explanation for action, not the permanent description of the organization.

Developmental-Demonstration Stages

When one examines the cycle for organization growth from stable to developmental to demonstration to restabilization one finds an interesting effect on the formal and informal activity in an organization.

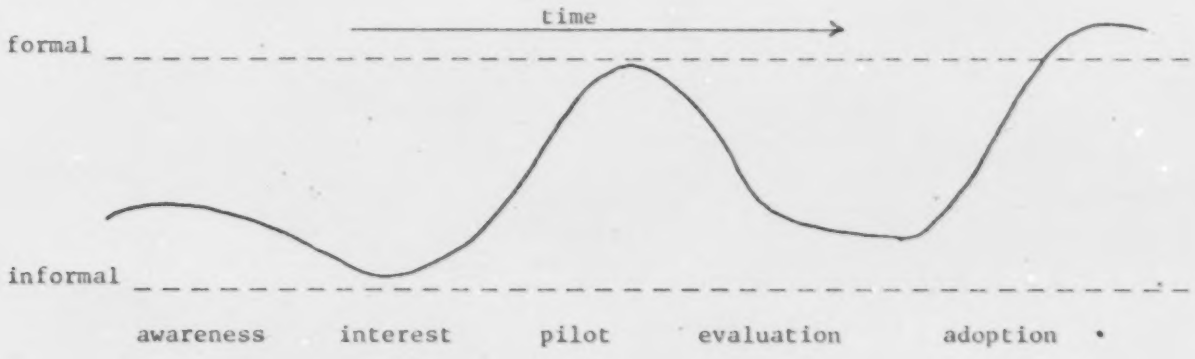


This graph indicates that if one hopes to move an organization through the phases indicated, one needs as a manager to support the development of different kinds of activities at different points in time. The graph also indicates what behavior a person should expect in an organization if it is a certain stage of development even if the history of the organization does not report such. This is particularly noticeable in organizations who have spent much time in the developmental phase and are now facing movement into a demonstration. The transition to demonstration requires increasingly formalized behavior. When one perceives an increase in the pressure for movement to demonstration, one should expect or initiate more normal activity patterns. Thus the number of written reports that establish norms, rules, patterns and relationships will increase. Consistency and standardization of expectations will also increase. The slope of the curve may be increased or decreased by action of the individuals, not the direction.

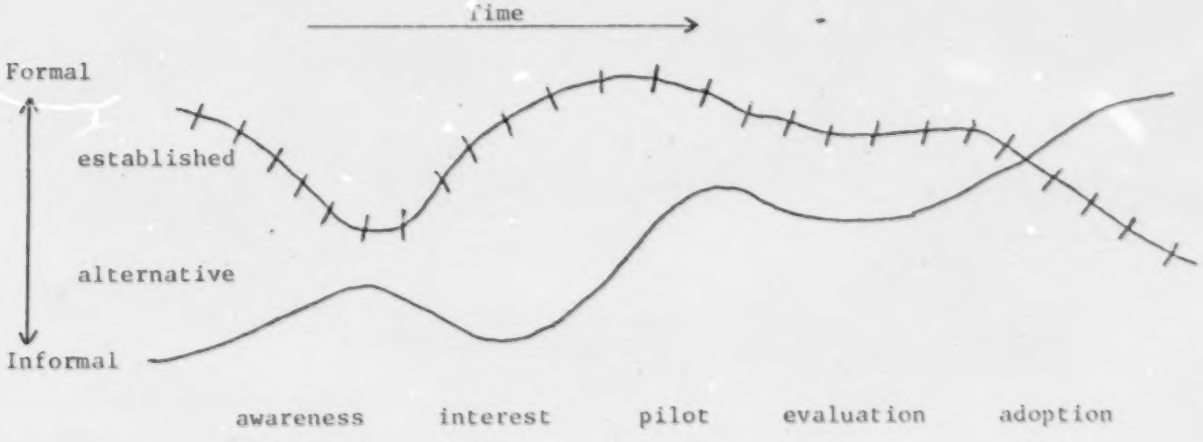
Installation Process

As an organization moves from developmental to demonstration, it normally follows an installation process which has the following stages: awareness of innovation, interest in innovation, pilot test of innovation, evaluation of applicability of

innovation to practice, and adoption of innovation in practice. The organization's formal and informal patterns at any of these stages depends in part on the age of an organization and on the normative style of the organization. No matter what the age of an organization is or what style of leadership exists at a given time some movement toward informal management patterns is necessary to energize persons in the organization. Also some organization movement toward formal patterns is necessary to energize the structures of the organization.



The rhetoric of an organization is often the basis for starting movement. The theory of organizing espoused publicly by the organization will influence the actual behavior in a formal or informal direction. The more established the organization the more it will maintain formal characteristics through a development-demonstration cycle; the more alternative an organization the more it will emphasize informal patterns and procedures through the development and demonstration cycle. The effective installation process in either an established or alternative organization requires the creation of formal patterns which are in writing; only the amount of written policies and procedures will vary in different types of organizations.



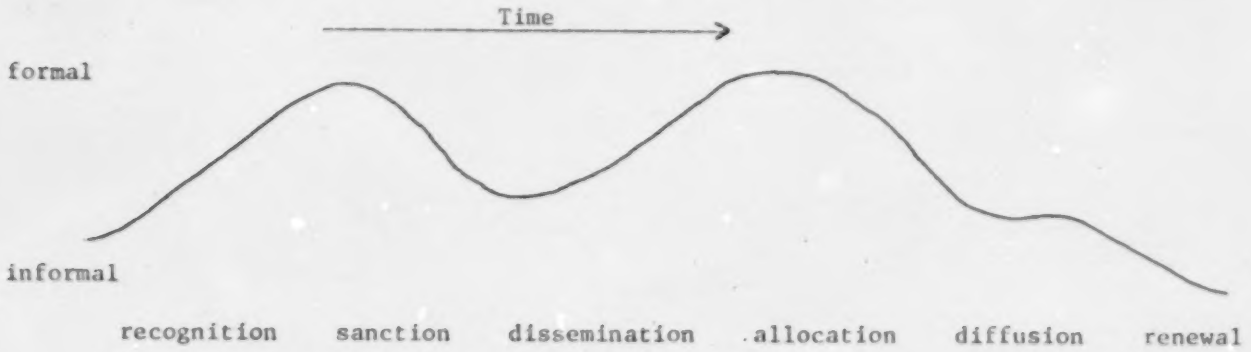
As individuals in organizations become more active in seeking involvement in the organization there is a tendency to seek to move toward informal patterns. If one is in an old organization, one tends to try to move the organization immediately

across the space that distinguishes the established from the alternative. Such a movement requires massive investment of outside intervention in an organization to move the action and expectation from a normative mode to a different normative mode; the larger the distance at a point in the cycle the greater the energy needed to bridge the gaps.

It may also be that an effort to increase the informality of patterns may be counterproductive to the installation process itself. If one evaluates an organization as being in the pilot testing stage which requires formal patterning, it is counterproductive to stress development of informal person oriented patterns unless one is attempting to stop or redirect an organization. For even in the installation process the sequential stages are consistent, not as rigid as in the maintenance process but consistent nevertheless.

Maintenance Process

As an organization seeks to establish itself it increases its maintenance of power, status, resources, personnel, domain. The maintenance process has definite stages: recognition, sanction, dissemination, allocation, diffusion, renewal. Again the amount of formal and informal patterns vary by stage.

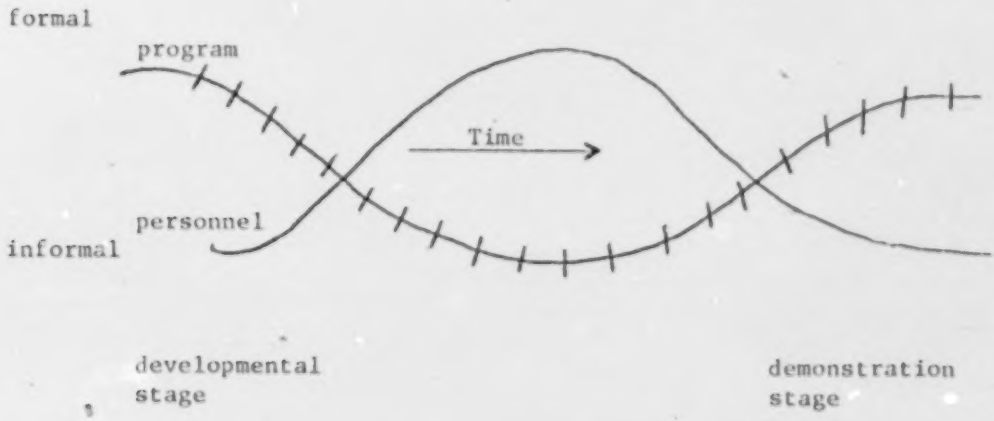


As the curve for this process indicates, it tends to develop based on informal patterns. And one knows one is at maintenance when individuals assume formal patterns when few if any exist. Many established or powerful organizations maintain themselves with only a legal base as the formal pattern with few if any other formal patterns. Many historical remnants are available to protect the organization and the individuals, but these exist as patterns to be called on or imbedded in memory or norms rather than patterns being developed or actualized.

Persons are expected to behave a certain way because the tradition is such, not because a way of behaving is requested.

People-Programs Focus

Another dimension of organization action which is observable is the organization's emphasis on managing people or programs. There are formal and informal patterns for each: persons are managed by verbal agreements and contracts; programs are managed by objectives or budgets. In addition, an evaluation of organization action requires a judgment by the manager about whether the present tendency is to formalize program development or personnel development.



As an organization moves over time, it tends to require that the manager be aware of the necessary movements from formal to informal on both the program and personnel development level. The more persons are involved and the longer an organization has existed the greater the tendency to confuse program quality expectations and personnel utilization expectations. Also, the continuous stress can be confused as political action particularly as personnel management requires development of a contract and in most organizations some form of unionization. Also the more informal the rhetoric of an organization, the personnel management patterns will tend to remain familial and political. The organization will report informal patterns when the familial and political patterns will follow established and often rigid norms public to those in the know.

If an individual perceives his role in an organization as introducing or developing program quality, the most subtle blockages will come from the formalized underground patterns. From the theory in use approach one has a better chance to establish an effective plan of action by the simple recognition of the pattern. This level of conceptualization itself allows for tracking in change in organization behavior, a chance which can be formal or informal.

Summary

One chooses to act in an organization where the espoused theory is compatible with one's own norms. One influences an organization effectively when one moves the theory in use toward one's espoused theory and the organization's espoused theory.

The movement can be formal or informal. The needed level of formality in an activity depends on the stage of development of the organization and probably also its size. Some more mature organizations will allow for informal and formal patterns at the same time. Most older organizations require insight about how much family or old-school-tie patterns are imbedded in the informal patterns and protected by formal agreements. Analyzing what the theory is that explains what is rather than accepting at face value the organization's statements about itself make it possible for a manager or a person in an organization to identify the leverage points for action and the dimensions on which timely action is possible.